



Aims and Objectives of the Anarchist Movement

**by the Redfern Black Rose Anarchist
Bookshop Collective (May 1986)**

This essay was prepared by the Black Rose Bookshop Collective for presentation at the Australian Anarchist Centenary Celebrations Conference held in May 1986 in Melbourne. Only about half of this essay was presented at the allocated conference session. It was originally written with publication in mind, but due to the constant pressures of the collective project, publication never occurred. Now at last you can read the full text of this important assessment of the state, structure and direction of the anarchist movement in Australia.

The present Black Rose collective should not be held responsible for the content of this essay, as the collective has totally changed in membership. Some traditions, practices and strategies are continued by the present Black Rose Collective.

John Englart

Problems We Face

We and a great deal of others recognise that this society is in a very bad state. Virtually wherever one looks one can see oppression, injustice, alienation and destruction of the environment. Men oppress women. Oppression of Lesbians and gays. People sell their time in alienated wage labour and buy it back as alienated leisure. Land is continuously stolen from aborigines. Forests are vandalised for profits. And moving in the background is the endless marching towards global war. Merely to mention the social ills of our time is to evoke the misery and frustration this society creates. All this presents a picture of a sick society stumbling to its doom. In creating anarchy, we have our work cut out for us.

Compounding the situation are people's attitudes towards how to make a better society. Most people, if they even see a solution, see it in terms of better government rather than no government, and most of these people do nothing but complain. A sense of apathy and hopelessness pervades the discussion of social issues. While some people don't care, others feel that the problems are so large that as individuals there is nothing which can be done. These attitudes of apathy and hopelessness are obviously one of the effects of the alienation our society creates, but within themselves they also recreate the social alienation. Many people who recognise the problems of our society alienate themselves even more through an over-indulgence of television. Television reinforces the status quo through its content, expands the fetish for commodities, and keeps people barricaded at home away from the rest of society. But even more dangerous is the social inactivity caused by an over-indulgence with drugs, especially heroin.

We have all seen the breakdown of personal relationships caused by people needing something to "help them along". A reliance on drugs is another commodity relation and is incredibly destructive for people like ourselves who see the need to organise and create new social relations. Heroin, in particular, can be very enticing when one has been abused by society or when one rejects that society altogether. But heroin is not a radical alternative. It must be seen as another form of social control which negates and alienates the radical tendencies in people who otherwise may have the energy and vision to become active in the anarchist movement. We have all seen this happen too many times to be unconcerned with its effects upon our movement as a whole.

Despite this, the people still struggle and the rulers respond. While co-option is the favoured tactic in Australia today, repression is still available to them if they judge it more effective. Any campaign which cannot be swallowed whole by the Labor Party and turned against its supporters is either locked out of mainstream politics or physically attacked. This in turn provides more reasons for people to give up in despair.

As an anarchist movement, we face problems which are specific to ourselves. The worst of which is the general negative attitude of people towards the idea of anarchy. The idea has been blackened by denigration and its supposed equivalence with chaos. Our reputation has been tarnished by the fact that in most places and at most times there has been a minority of people who advocated violence to certain degrees. This orientation towards violence appears

to many people to be the most common or only aspect of anarchy. This view is constantly reinforced in the status quo through the media, television, and education systems.

At the bottom of this problem and what is at stake is a view of human nature. It is not the word anarchy which frightens people, it is the idea of life without government. Society is taught and people believe that it is human nature to be greedy, cruel, competitive, and aggressive. It is therefore necessary for government to restrain us all in our own best interests.

Without government, goes the popular wisdom, life would be nasty, brutish, and short. In this light it is easy to see why we are regarded as mad bombers by people who have never heard of us. All political movements of any significance in modern times have experimented with terrorism at some stage. However, only anarchism has had terrorism defined as its essence. The mass subconscious saw the individual anarchists, the enragés, of the late 19th century confirming their own fears of freedom and revealing the shape of things to come. Despite our best endeavours and the passage of a century we are still saddled with that burden. The problem of anarchism being seen as intrinsically negative must be overcome. Considerable work needs to be done to raise awareness of what anarchism stands for both inside and outside the movement.

Cultures of Resistance

However, the situation is not hopeless. Protest and resistance can be seen striving to combat all sorts of oppression. In many countries resistance is forced underground but in Australia we are relatively fortunate to be able to organise openly and with considerably fewer obstacles.

Many social movements today have an anarchist spirit even though they may use different words to describe themselves. These include the feminist movement and sections of the environmentalist and peace movements.

In the last 20 years the new left counter culture has pursued many anarchist ideals. The struggles for a freer sexuality, equality between the sexes and all races, concern for the environment and support for land rights have been widely advocated in the alternative movement. A greater degree of tolerance towards individuals and ideas outside the mainstream and a wish for a more diverse society have been accompanied by a concern for world peace, disarmament and anti-militarist aspirations, dissatisfaction with the alienated and fragmented lifestyles of the materialist consumer mainstream and the pursuit of a more holistic alternative. This can be seen in a preference for natural foods, and for some, a vegetarian or vegan diet, as well as an interest in natural therapies and a holistic approach to health, conservation and living outside of conventional family structures. At the same time, dissatisfaction with conventional orthodox religion has led to widespread atheism or to a more personal spirituality.

From an anarchist point of view, the feminist movement is an especially valuable part of oppositional culture. The fundamental aims of ending sexual oppression and of breaking down con-

ventional stereotypes are essential for the creation of an anarchist society. At the same time a lot of the organisational practices and attitudes of feminists should put the mainstream anarchist movement to shame. It is generally true that the feminist movement is more anarchist than the anarchist movement. The Redfern Black Rose Anarchist Collective has learnt a lot from feminism in developing our own practice. The overall structure of the feminist movement with its preference for small groups, self-help and direct action, and its aversion for hierarchical and authoritarian styles of organisation and decision making is a real source of hope in the struggle against all forms of oppression.

The punk subculture also embodied a quite remarkable anarchist spirit, though this is probably less true today than 3 years ago. A "do it yourself" attitude combined with strong localised scenes created a decentralised network, criss-crossed by small circulation fanzines and records carrying largely anarchist statements on a huge range of subjects. The essence of "punk" is, or was, a healthy questioning of authority, an emphasis on simplicity and the idea that anyone could, and should, start their own band, record label, fanzine, etc..

"Think globally, act locally" is a familiar slogan of the environmental and peace movements, reflecting the presence of a substantial anarchist influence amongst a vast hodge podge of political ingredients. Unfortunately, careful political analysis is not the main hallmark of these movements and anarchist slogans have frequently served as a cover for quite authoritarian practice. Moreover, many of the people involved seem oblivious to the lessons of history and still look towards conventional political solutions like joining the A.L.P. (Australian Labor Party) or the Democrats, or forming new parties like the Green Party and the N.D.P. (Nuclear Disarmament Party).

The party organisations of the authoritarian left are clearly bankrupt and floundering in their attempts to co-opt the new anarchic tendencies around them. But, as long as they remain the only visible and relatively widespread organisational model they will continue to attract the most committed revolutionaries purely for the lack of a credible alternative.

Local peace groups, public radio, refuges, food co-ops, and some campaigning issues have provided the setting for a growth of small groups and organisations with a strong focus on community participation, cooperation, voluntary work and non-hierarchical structures (no official positions like secretary and president, or having such positions rotated or limited to short periods of tenure). There are also a small number of worker coops being established which reflect the new political awareness.

Unfortunately, good information on anti-authoritarian organisation is hard to get hold of and these projects can be fertile grounds for demoralisation, and recruiters for new or established political parties. If we, as anarchists, are to stop this process of decay and co-option, we will need to put forward a clear statement of how we want things to develop and to spread this together with good quality information about the nuts and bolts of collective practice and organisational theory.

A Small Group Approach

We would like to see the anarchist movement, and eventually an anarchist society, made up of large numbers of autonomous small groups, each engaged in its own project. The precise composition and nature of each group would vary considerably. The one essential feature would be that control over all aspects of the group, and its affairs, should rest within that group itself. No outside individuals, groups or 'networking structures' should have any authority over them.

The number of people in a group or collective would depend upon the nature of the project, the available energies of the people involved and how it organises itself. The optimum number of members usually quoted in small group manuals is between 6 and 12, though we feel that it may be feasible to have up to 20 people on especially large and demanding projects.

Each group would set its own priorities and decide what activities it will undertake. However, we have found from our own experience and observations of other groups that maintaining a precise focus for action is critical if a group is to get anything worthwhile done. So, for example, a group may opt to run a coffee shop, or a women's refuge, produce a newspaper on local affairs, or perform rock 'n roll, print posters, produce a radio program, or campaign around a specific issue. The project chosen should reflect the interests and abilities of the members and what they see as the one most pressing need of the movement and people in struggle at the time.

The internal structure and practices of each group should reflect a commitment to challenging hierarchy and developing an authentic anarchist practice. Views as to how this should be done will inevitably vary from one group to another as reflects the difficulty of the task and the differences in peoples' experiences, conditioning and problems as well as the theoretical differences about how social change is best achieved.

In recent years our movement has heard a lot of talk about federations, networking, delegate conferences and the like. In our view, this is premature and under existing conditions can actually create serious problems. If they are to be genuinely anarchistic, federations and networks must at all times serve the interests of the member groups. This can only be guaranteed if the groups are able to tailor the networking structure to suit their own particular needs. Of course, this can only be done if the constituent groups already exist and have worked out what they want from a network, federation, or conference. If we try to create the federation or network before the constituent groups exist then it seems inevitable that the umbrella structure will achieve a primary position - that it will mould the groups to suit its own purpose and will thus exert power over the small groups. Seen in this light, talk of federations and networking structures in the absence of a strong groundswell of existing small groups is both mistaken and dangerous to the process of creating an authentically anarchist movement and society.

That anarchists insist on premature attempts to create umbrella organisations presumably reflects our conditioning in main stream society. The success of a movement is judged by its ability to create centralised power structures and to mobilise large "masses" of people. The primary focus is on the macro level of social activity. At this level the personal dimension is lost and the individual inevitably becomes alienated and irrelevant to the project at hand. We contend

that as anarchists we must learn to turn away from this way of looking at things. We should reject "the masses" as a valid vehicle for political change, and should instead seek an approach which always respects the autonomy of the individual and the small groups which individuals voluntarily form to better articulate their interests, desires and ideals.

Concepts like "the masses" reflect the consumerist and alienated patterns of mainstream capitalist society. In the same way that "networks" or "federations" which are not firmly rooted in well established small groups, they avoid coming to grips with issues of immediate relevance to ourselves and they also avoid confronting and making difficult choices.

On Principles, compromise and surviving in society

In the process of building a movement and confronting difficult decisions anarchists are often criticised for making compromises and supposedly selling out their principles. However, it is clear to us that an attempt to live entirely by our principles in this society would have us spending most of our time in jail and possibly starving to death. Clearly another approach is called for, since the holding of anarchist principles should not disqualify us from exercising the few rights which we have established in this society.

We feel that it is up to each person and collective to decide which compromises to make and how far to compromise in the course of their own activities. Thus, at the Black Rose Bookshop, we compromise by paying rent in order to have a stable public location. In order to make our belief of not being paid for movement work viable, many of us are forced to work for wages in the capitalist economy doing things we think should not be done at all. We have made what we consider the best choice in the circumstances. However, others may make different compromises, and they would be no less anarchist for doing so. The important consideration in evaluating possible compromises is that of who will be doing the compromising. We have no right to gang up with the system to make it harder for others to live out their principles.

Therefore, in considering how to live out our ideals, there is no need to feel guilty about compromises as such. Rather, discussion should centre on whether the compromises are worth what we get, and whether we are compromising only ourselves and not others as well. In the long run, solutions will have to be found in building alternatives which cut down the necessity for making compromises.

Anatomy of our Collective

The Redfern Black Rose Collective has been running a bookshop for 3½ years. Prior to that time most of the founding members of this collective had been involved in another anarchist bookshop project which had been going for five years. At Black Rose we have been selling about \$20,000 worth of anarchist books, records and related materials each year. By commercial standards, this figure is very small and would not even pay the rent if it were required to do so. Never the less we feel our efforts are yielding worthwhile results, partly because of the nature of what we are selling and partly because of the way in which we operate.

Everything which we sell is related in some way to anarchism, as we understand the concept. Either the contents describes, discusses or promotes anarchist action or lifestyle, or it is produced by anarchists or in an anarchistic way. In this way we offer information for people wanting to find out about anarchism, resources for people trying to put anarchism into practice in both the political and cultural domains, and distribution point for anarchist publishers.

Some of the material we sell is difficult if not impossible to get elsewhere. For example, we are one of the largest suppliers of Movement for a New Society literature in Australia, and we have the largest range of anarchist punk records in the country. Furthermore, the quantities in which we buy from some small scale anarchist publishers is sufficient to affect the viability and scale of their operation. Even where we handle works like LeGuin's "The Dispossessed", which are freely available through regular commercial outlets, we are able to place them in an anarchist context. In doing so, they take on the voice of a living tradition rather than appearing merely as an interesting academic idea.

The commercial structure which we have established is designed to challenge mainstream economic institutions in the most fundamental manner we can achieve. All money received from sales of stock goes into a special account which is used only for purchasing more stock. We sell at a nominal markup of 10% on wholesale costs. The normal commercial markup for books is 66%. Some of us were previously involved in a project which sold books at cost, but we found that stock ran down due to unavoidable damage and loss. So we settled on the relatively insignificant 10% markup to prevent this from happening. All work in the shop is voluntary, no one has any financial interest in the form of wages or profits, and all of the shop's running expenses (rent, electricity, advertising, etc.) are financed from donations. The result is fulling in keeping with our opposition to the wage system and our support for land rights as against private ownership of property.

We follow a land-rights model of practice in that no one is understood to own the shop's stock or trading name. Rather, we see the collective as trustees or stewards of this resource. By remaining outside the wage system we have created a situation where nobody has any reason to work in the shop other than the immediate gratification of seeing this project continue, and the feelings of solidarity arising out of working with this particular group of people. When these are insufficient to offset the hassles and effort of working in the shop there is nothing to bind people to the shop, no income on which people may become dependant, and no perks or privileges. In this way, the project is protected from ever becoming a means to an end, it can only survive as long as enough people see it as an end in itself, to keep it going. This structure

means that every item we have for sale is something we have selected purely because we want to make it available. Our method also means that the shop will survive and continue to offer its services regardless of the judgement of the market.

So we have severed many of the control strings of the capitalist status quo. This means that for people working in the shop we have to learn a whole new way of thinking about what we are doing. Our customers and supporters are also challenged by circumstances which do not fit conventional attitudes. From the customer's point of view there are the benefits of our low prices (our import records are about half the prices charged by commercial import shops) and the fact that we are under no pressure to sell to people. This, we hope, contributes to a relaxed and friendly attitude in the shop.

In our internal organisation we are trying to translate the cliched buzzwords of the anarchist movement, like "consensus decision making" and "job rotation", into practical working procedures. In order to do this we have defined the membership of the collective very clearly. We have put into place precise mechanisms whereby people can join, leave, or if necessary be expelled. (Though we naturally hope that this last procedure will never have to be used.) The joining procedure takes 3 months. In this time a person has the chance to learn how the shop works, and both they and the collective have an opportunity to assess their compatibility for working together in the group. Once accepted as a member each person undertakes to come to meetings regularly, spend some time each week minding the shop, and take responsibility for at least one of the 12 "back-room" jobs like book ordering, accounts, or publicity. We require people to do all three of these things so that everyone is seen to take responsibility for the decisions which they will be carrying out, and so that only people who work in the shop hold the power to make decisions.

From the time we opened we have had a job rotation system whereby every 8 months the "back-room" jobs change hands. It is understood that eventually every member will do every job before a member takes on the same job twice. This is a mechanism which has worked fairly smoothly and has ensured that no one individual has exclusive knowledge of any area of the shop's operation.

At the same time we have put a lot of effort into understanding and implementing consensus decision making. We have formulated our own working definition of consensus and have found it to work well. We have no provision to fall back on voting except for an expulsion. We have however provided an opportunity for individuals to register a formal dissent from a decision as a weighty protest in especially intractable circumstances.

Consensus decision making and job rotation are part of a general commitment by the collective to challenge hierarchy and to promote equal, caring and cooperative practices within our group. In this respect we have also incorporated a number of practices within our weekly meetings. Firstly, we start each meeting with a sharing in which each person has a chance to speak uninterrupted. Usually people say how they are feeling and maybe mention anything significant that has happened to them in the past week. Or it can be an opportunity to raise a topic which they can't find the space to bring up elsewhere or to let off steam about something that is bugging them with the shop, collective, or life in general.

During the meetings we have a minutes taker, facilitator, and a time keeper. Between these three the meeting is kept focussed on the agenda, the meeting is kept flowing smoothly, they ensure that everyone has space to put their opinions and feelings forward, and a record is kept

of what was discussed and decided. In evolving the role of the facilitator we have drawn heavily from Movement for a New Society literature, especially the pamphlet "Meeting Facilitation: The No Magic Method", the "Manual for Group Facilitators", and the relevant sections of the "Resource Manual for a Living Revolution". The minutes taker, facilitator and time keeper jobs are rotated each week according to a roster which involves all members of the collective.

Each meeting is conducted in two parts. First we spend about an hour and a half discussing a major theoretical question like "what is Consensus?" or "Sexual politics in relation to the collective" or the drafting of this document. Then, after a short break, we deal with the more mundane business items, drawing up the shop roster, for the following week, processing the incoming mail, book selection, and the like. At the end of the meeting we have an evaluation of the meeting. This followed by an affirmation exercise in which each member affirms another member according to a pattern which ensures that each person is affirmed. After that we close the meeting by going around the room and each person saying something that they are looking forward to in the week ahead. In addition to the above we use cooperative games on occasion (about one in three meetings) to break tension or to invigorate a drowsy meeting. We also frequently interrupt proceedings to go around the group and get everyone's point of view on the question at hand.

Our experience has shown that applying these practices makes us more rather than less efficient. They help us towards putting our politics into practice. This, of course, is not to say we haven't been without problems. Whilst we haven't been able to completely eradicate hierarchy in the collective, we have made significant progress towards that goal. We have done this by consistently trying to identify problems and dealing with them; rather than hiding them under a cloak of unstructured practice and obscurantist ideology, and then pretending they don't exist any more. Some of these problems arise out of our incomplete political awareness, whilst others are more or less deliberate results of choices we have made.

Membership of our collective requires a very substantial commitment. At minimum there is a four hour meeting every Saturday afternoon, plus four hours of looking after the shop and responsibility for one of the back-room jobs. For some of us it can involve three or more times this. Our decision not to have any kind of wages paid by the shop means that all this comes on top of our day to day struggle to survive within the capitalist system. Revolutionary change is bound to be a huge undertaking, so it would be surprising if joining a group which has a serious revolutionary intent were not to involve a major commitment. Furthermore, the dominant culture's promotion of consumer lifestyles and the resultant lack of confidence in our own ability to change things directly means that people don't tend to have that kind of commitment. Even when they do, the sheer difficulty of surviving a job or life on the dole makes it very difficult to sustain. Add this to the inevitable personality clashes which arise in any group and it will come as no surprise that finding enough people to join the collective is a continual problem.

When we opened we had 7 people and this gradually increased to 10 in January 1985. By February 1986 we were down to 4 and it looked as if the shop would have to close. We are now back up to 7 members which is about the minimum number we can properly survive on. But we need one more before we can resume opening on Mondays and more still before all the back-room jobs are fully attended to.

Our decision to pay all the shop's overheads (rent, electricity, etc.) from donations also brings its own problems. About 80% of the donations come from regular pledges by members of the collective. This is hardly surprising and not, in itself, a bad thing; but it does make us dependant

on the wages of members employed in the capitalist system. At the same time, because the shop is open 5 days, and hopefully 6 days a week, we are also dependant upon the time of people who are not employed, in the conventional sense of the word. The problems arise in that people with full time jobs and people who are "unemployed" tend to have quite attitudes, social activities and priorities. These differences can be very difficult to reconcile. When the collective was down to 5 and then 4 members they were all people who had full time jobs and either owned their own home or were paying off a mortgage. Several of the people who had left the collective in the previous 6 months had referred to the social atmosphere created by people with jobs in their reasons for leaving.

Our location has also been seen by some people as a problem. It was originally selected because of the low rent and Redfern Station, served by every train route in the Sydney region, is only a ten minute walk up the street. We were also pleased that the Redfern / Alexandria / Waterloo region is one of the last major enclaves of aboriginal, poor, marginalised and traditional working class people in the inner Sydney area, for these are the people to whom anarchism speaks most directly. However, people joining the collective have also pointed out that we would be selling far more if we had a more "up market" location, and that the Redfern location is out of the way for most of our potential customers and is particularly hostile for women travelling alone in the evening to the shop. Partly in response to this last point we have moved our meeting times from Sunday evenings to Saturday afternoons, and our weekly "meet the collective" dinners from late Wednesday evenings to early Saturday evenings. Apart from the fact that we are under no pressure to sell books in order to stay open, a more "up market" location would mean higher rent, the cost of moving and a loss of continuity with established customers. Also, we are now in an area which could never support a book or record shop which wasn't heavily protected from market forces. We are the only bookshop in the area and have been thanked by some local people for being there as well as for our low prices.

Sexual issues, despite the collective's endorsement of radical feminist politics, has been another source of major problems. This has been on a level of "who is or is not sleeping with who" as well as centering around different perceptions of how to encourage personal growth or consciousness raising within the group. Eighteen months ago our collective had more women members than men, for the last six months we have had only one woman member. The series of resignations which brought about this change were disappointing, for various aspects of sexual politics were given by different women in their reasons for leaving.

On questions of sharing the work in the shop we have been fairly successful in breaking down normal gender stereotypes. All members share in cleaning, washing up and cooking as well as the other bookshop jobs (correspondence, book ordering, etc.). On the other hand, child care has been a question we haven't dealt with at all well, despite its' occupying us in our meetings for 12 months at one stage.

Jealousies and frustrations arising out of who was and was not sleeping with who set the main part of the emotional atmosphere for the first 3 years without ever being properly discussed. We now have a situation where no two members of the collective are engaged in a sexual relationship together and we have taken advantage of this space to start discussing the issues involved. Hopefully we will do better on this count in the future.

More important than all of these, though, has been a series of personality clashes which seem to have some gender based roots. These are situations where women have been characterised as irresolute, over sensitive, or high strung, while men have been bullheaded, insensitive, self-

ish and moody. These issues came into focus in an argument over how to proceed with consciousness raising type discussions where individuals would feel exposed and threatened as a result. Should we proceed boldly, taking risks and ignoring many potential reasons not to proceed (a view which became identified as predominantly "male") or should we concentrate on building a sense of security amongst the group, a 'safe space' where people would eventually feel comfortable about discussing any subject (a view which became identified as predominantly 'female'). In the end the former position tended to win out and two of the women in the group resigned shortly thereafter, each giving this as part of their reason for leaving.

Another problem area in which we have received a lot of criticism is our apparent insularity, not participating in current campaigns or debates, not putting energy into networking or even into correspondence with our friends and comrades. In part this is a consequence of our views on how the movement should be structured. We are a bookshop collective and need to keep this clearly in focus. There will need to be other collectives to do other jobs. With regard to networking, we will be ready to do this only when there are more substantial collectives in existence to give the network some purpose. In the meantime, we are much too busy to join a mutual support structure for people who wish to celebrate the fact that they cannot think of anything to do for themselves in whatever circumstances they happen to be. We would, however, point out that we have cooperated very effectively with the Victorian Down to Earth in our coordination of the self-management village at the 1986 Confest. And we stand ready to talk with groups like Libertarian Workers if they have any specific proposals for cooperation on a relevant project.

Our low level of communication with other groups and individuals and writing articles for relevant magazines is something we are not so complacent about. Unfortunately, even when our membership is of reasonable size we have found that certain jobs in the rotation get relatively poor attention if the person with that job also has another job. External communications (or correspondence) , internal communication, and publicity, tend to be the main things which suffer in this respect. When our membership plummeted to its lowest level, and even since then with 3 new members learning how the shop operates, the more regular jobs like book ordering, accounts, and mail orders have gotten bogged down and the communications and publicity have just about ground to a halt. However we are beginning to get back on our feet and hopefully with a further increase in membership we can establish a better reputation for correspondence and writing articles.

A related problem is our lack of participation in political discussion and agitational work either within the movement or in the wider population. One answer to this would be to fall back on our self-definition as a bookshop and call for the setting up of other collectives for the specific purpose of agitation. But we feel that would be undesirable to separate the perspective of the working collective from that of agitation. In order to bring these together we have created the position of 'agitator' and incorporated it into our job rotation system. This would effectively give each of us in turn an eight month break from other back room jobs in order to engage in political debates in a wider forum, whilst still having the support and grounding of membership in the ongoing bookshop collective. Unfortunately, since creating this position we have not had enough people to put it into practice. So again this will need to wait until we have more members.

Comparison with Similar Organisations

Jura Books (Sydney)

We felt it would be valuable to look at a range of other organisations in order to highlight what we do and don't mean by the organisational principles we have set out above. As our bookshop was borne out of a split at Jura Books in Newtown, and many of the issues involved in the split were one of organisational practice, this seems to be the logical place to start.

Jura had been going for about 5 years at the time of the split and some of the founders of Black Rose had been there from the beginning. Immediately after the split there was virtually no contact between the two collectives. This situation has changed somewhat in the intervening 3½ years with the passage of time and the arrival of new people on the scene. Never the less, what follows is based largely on extrapolation from the situation 3½ years ago in the light of what was said by the people who remained at Jura; with some fresh information gleaned in conversation with members of the Jura collective and others who have had contact with them.

Strictly speaking, Jura Books is the bookshop at 417 King Street (Newtown - Ed) occupying the shop and an office upstairs. The rest of the building is shared with a variety of other groups including 'The Rebel Worker Group', 'The Fanya Baron Library', 'The Everything Collective', a poster archive, and from time to time such short lived projects as a whole food buying co-op, bicycle repair co-op. The bookshop is ostensibly set up along similar lines to those of Black Rose, with a clearly delimited project and a carefully defined joining procedure. However the joining procedures are less rigorously applied than at Black Rose. Membership does not involve any special responsibility to attend meetings or maintain any specified minimum level of activity. Some people feel that anybody who contributes in any way to the shop is thereby a member of the collective on an equal footing with everybody else.

In practice however the bookshop is managed by a core group who attend meetings regularly and have long established knowledge of what is going on. Jura doesn't attempt to use consensus decision making. It is seen by people there as being impractical, and given the overall working practices it probably is. This is why Black Rose insists on all members attending meetings regularly and having minimum input into other areas of the shop's activity. It is also why we have adopted the various meeting procedures which we use.

Jura doesn't spend as much time in theoretical discussion as Black Rose. It's weekly meetings are confined to "business" matters, and there are supposed to be quarter yearly "direction finding" meetings involving everybody around the shop. These are often missed unless some crisis has developed. This reflects, in part, a different attitude to the various established schools of anarchism.

Both groups refrain from identifying with any specific school, officially recognising all (except the so called anarcho-capitalists) as equally legitimate users of the name. Black Rose attempts to put them together into a meaningful whole, resolving differences where possible and adopting whatever seems appropriate to our project from any of them. Jura, on the other hand, tends to see the differences between the various strands as a barrier to adopting practices

from any one of them, for fear of alienating partisans of the other schools. Jura's refusal to implement meeting structures like sharing circles, affirmation exercises, or cooperative games reflect a philosophical disagreement with Black Rose.

We at Black Rose believe that human beings are innately capable of a wide range of social behaviour, some of it anarchic, some of it hierarchical. What we actually end up like depends upon our socialisation and on the nature of our ongoing interactions and experiences. The capitalist, patriarchal world around us has developed in such a way as to encourage the hierarchical side of human nature to an overwhelming extent. If we are to learn and develop anarchic behaviour, then we will need to set structures suited for that purpose. Those at Jura, on the other hand, believe that our innate character is fundamentally anarchic. If we can peel away the influence of the oppressive society around us by creating a space as free as possible from any structures at all, this will allow that natural anarchism to shine through.

Jura does support the principle of job rotation, but their approach is quite different from that of Black Rose. We would be more inclined to call their practice 'job sharing' rather than 'job rotation' in that they tend to break down jobs into their smallest possible components and then distribute these amongst those members of the collective interested in that aspect of the collective's work. This approach is most clearly seen in the area of book ordering where each person orders from one or two publishers. These sub-jobs are usually handed on when someone leaves or when new members make a request to be included in the process, although in principle all jobs could be declared vacant at any time. Clearly, the intention behind all this is to distribute the workload and knowledge of the group's working as widely as possible without adopting structures which push people or require them to take on anything they are unsure of. In fact, the element of 'compulsion' in Black Rose's job rotation system and meeting structures are something which Jura regards as anti-anarchist.

It is also worth remarking on the relationship of Jura to the other groups at 417 King Street. Virtually all the groups have some overlapping membership with the bookshop collective and some have been wholly made up of bookshop members. Some people in the Jura collective are involved in several of the projects, and at least one of them is involved in several projects outside. From our point of view this reflects a failure to choose a focus and weakens all the projects accordingly. The tendency for this process to dissipate energy and lead to a general collapse is restrained in practice by the ongoing and established bookshop work which tends to draw people back in. Never the less, Jura has complained of a shortage of money since the split and has also had trouble maintaining regular opening hours even when the bookshop has claimed a large collective membership. In this respect Jura seems to function in a permanent state of crisis which appears to be demoralising for the people involved and inhibiting to coherent theoretical development. Over time this has led to a gradual watering down of the high anarchist ideals which accompanied the bookshop's opening. The latest step in this process being the increase in markup to 25% and taking out of the till a small amount to pay part of the overheads account.

When compared with our suggested structure for the anarchist movement the Jura bookshop stands up as a viable small group with differences from our internal practices reflecting a clear difference in interpretation of anarchist principles. However, when the relationship with the other projects at 417 King Street is taken into account a certain degree of fuzziness creeps into the picture. This appears to be enlarging over time and threatening the long term coherence and viability of the bookshop project.

Anarres Centre (Brisbane)

These worrying aspects of Jura's practice were carried to their extreme in the Anarres Centre in Brisbane. Named after the anarchist planet in LeGuin's 'The Dispossessed', it opened as an anarchist social centre for about 9 months in 1985. The centre set out to provide a bookshop, library, food co-op, natural health clinic, children's play area, Saturday night dinner, and entertainment venue, and a meeting space for various other groups, like anarcho-syndicalists and feminists.

A weekly general meeting decided issues and policies regarding the centre and a person from each of the 'collectives' running the activities listed above would report on their activities. A dinner and formal discussion session were held on a separate night with a different topic being discussed each week.

Right from the start the centre was beset with problems. Although there were always plenty of enthusiastic people eager to get involved, they set out to do too much. They just didn't seem to realise the limits on time, money, expertise and support that doing so many things would inevitably run up against. Many people at the centre were involved in several of the collectives simultaneously, spreading their energies and commitment far too thinly. Those involved set up a centre and then hoped that collectives would gather support within it and grow. We are not surprised that this failed to happen as we saw this approach as being unsound from the outset.

Membership of the centre was never properly defined. People just seemed to come and go which caused many problems. It undermined the commitment necessary to keep such a project going. At the same time, when people did not turn up for meetings on a regular basis they could easily become unaware of vital issues concerning the centre. It also wasted a great deal of time and energy going over things again and again, reversing decisions from week to week depending on who turned up. On top of this, because no real commitment was demanded of people there, a group of hangers on developed who had little regard for the people who were working to keep things going.

So, when the ever difficult area of sexual politics became the subject of a major dispute there was no properly established forum where the questions could be adequately explored. With no coherent structure or group identity there could be no sharing circles, affirmations, cooperative games or effective facilitation of any sort. The result was that the conflicting and overblown expectations of the people involved tore the project apart the first time they came to the surface.

In short, the Anarres Centre provides us with a copy book example of how not to proceed. Starting the 'network' and then trying to set up collectives to fit within it is a clear case of putting the cart before the horse. We believe it would have been far more effective for people to get together and start a collective for one clearly defined purpose, be it a bookshop, women's refuge, food co-op, radio program or whatever.

Libertarian Workers for a Self Managed Society (Melbourne)

This reversal of focus can also be seen in the activities of the Melbourne based group, Libertarian Workers. Established in Melbourne in 1977 the Libertarian Workers for a Self-Managed Society describe themselves as anarcho-communists; seeing workers' and community councils as

central to a society in which individuals have "equal decision making power and an equal share of goods produced". Their main aim is the propagation of anarchist ideas through the production of their bulletin and promotion of an internationalistic Anarchy. The group also produces a half hour fortnightly radio show which it distributes to other radio collectives, and the group provides an important focus through which much correspondence is channelled.

The official structure of Libertarian Workers is not the direction which we would like to see the anarchist movement following. It is a very traditional structure which reproduces many aspects of political parties, being more concerned with spreading anarchist propaganda rather than developing anarchist practice. Although on paper the Libertarian Workers sets out to be a large embracing organisation, in practice they have formed a tight knit and well defined autonomous collective which reflects much of what we are advocating.

In recent years we have observed a commitment to personal growth within the group, something which has led to an improvement in relationships with other groups. The lack of material written by members of Libertarian Workers in the last edition of their bulletin reflects a certain lack of interest in their own practice, although the reprinting of Bob James' article would seem to indicate otherwise.

In summary we see two Libertarian Workers. One on paper and one in practice, the latter being more in keeping with what we are suggesting.

Coalition Against I.D.'s (Sydney)

How the lack of focus on internal structure in an anarchistic group can negatively affect its ability to be successful is seen in the Sydney based group, the Coalition Against I.D.'s. The Coalition was set up to campaign against the proposed identity card, and includes a member of the Black Rose collective. While it was envisaged as an umbrella organisation for both groups and individuals, it quickly lost all ties to other organisations, two of which have ceased to exist.

The coalition has virtually no visible structure. The only such aspects are a chairperson, treasurer and secretary, and even the chairperson does not chair meetings or perform any other specialised function. There is no defined membership, no agreed meeting procedure, such as consensus or voting, use of agenda and the like, and there is no statement of the aims and objectives of the group. The Coalition is simply a name, a bank account, a Post Office Box and whoever happens to be in the room at the time.

Much of the group's low profile and lack of effectiveness can be traced back to not having an agreed and visible structure. Because there is no expectation of, let alone a responsibility to, a viable level of commitment, people become frustrated at the lack of seriousness and action and leave. It is only possible to tell if somebody has left the group if they don't turn up for meetings for a month or two. Because the structure is invisible and totally informal, the Coalition has little to entice an interested person to find the initiative for the commitment which membership would require. Because it asks nothing of members the Coalition receives very little from them. While the group is aware of its shortcomings, finding the energy to overcome them is difficult. At the moment modest attempts to do so are being made and the Coalition expects an improvement in the future.

Women's Refuges - Delvena and Marrickville (Sydney)

There are projects which are far more in keeping with our hopes for well defined and stable collectives. Within the Sydney area there are several women's refuges which are organised and run on a collective basis. Marrickville and Delvena are two which contain some of the elements which we see as positive developments towards a growing anarchist society. The specific goal of the refuges is to provide free shelter and food for victims of domestic violence. These refuges, run by women for women, reflect the feminist idea that only women can liberate themselves from their position in the male dominated society. In trying to fulfil this goal and idea, the internal structure of these two refuges challenge the hierarchical social structure around them.

Delvena is collectively run by seven full time paid workers and various volunteers, most of whom are ex-residents. Both collectives, in order to overcome the cultural and language barriers between migrant and aboriginal residents and white Anglo workers have self-imposed criteria of always including at least 2 migrants and one aboriginal in the collective. The wages and the number of people needed to keep the refuge open is decided by the collective as a whole. In order to allow for more ex-residents getting the experience and the chance to work in the collective, there is an attempt to limit the time spent as a paid worker to two years. The seven workers do have separate jobs like 'child-care', 'book keeping', making follow up visits and the like, but all the workers help each other out when it is needed. Rather than job rotation, this leans towards a flexible form of job sharing, but the aim is still to spread skills and equalise the workload.

Decisions about the collective and the day to day running of the refuge are reached through a consensus approach at weekly meetings. The residents are urged to attend these meetings and to become a part of the collective process. At the meetings, a weekly schedule is drawn up which includes designating a worker and resident to do the shopping for the refuge and a rotation of the cleaning, cooking and washing jobs amongst the residents. These meetings are also a time for general discussion about the refuge, the collective and problems which arise between residents or between residents and workers. At Marrickville there are also monthly meetings so that all the people involved with running the refuge: part-time workers and volunteers, night staff and any ex-residents are actively involved in the decisions of the refuge. Both refuges also have annual meetings where the wages and financial needs of the refuge are reviewed.

Out of these annual meetings come the government funding requests. The fact that these refuges are funded by the government and rely upon those funds to stay in operation does not negate the many positive aspects of the collectives as long as the internal structures and goals of the refuges are not dominated by demands from the government.

These refuge collectives are exactly the kind of thing which will contribute towards creating an anarchist future. They have a specific goal and feminist focus which they fulfil whilst challenging present social structures. Their goals and focus add to the diversity of autonomous collectives, more of which are needed throughout Australia. They show that hierarchy and domination can be challenged in another aspect of social life and also attempt to ensure the freedom to self determination and the right of free association.

Worker Co-ops - Inner City Cycles (Sydney)

There are also examples of small groups breaking away from mainstream capitalist business practices to create worker co-ops with a strong political motivation, although a large degree of compromise is required to survive within the wider capitalist context. One particular example in Sydney is Inner City Cycles which has gradually developed into a "Worker owned ownership company" (of which there are 15 registered in N.S.W.). The current membership of Inner City Cycles is 2 women and 2 men.

In joining the collective, all prospective members are required to complete a 6 month probationary period to decide whether they and the other collective members can work together. After being accepted they are required to place a nominal amount of share capital into the collective and to take an equal responsibility for the shop's affairs. There is also a policy to maintain equal numbers of men and women in the collective which involves encouraging women into what has been a very male dominated industry and sport.

All members of Inner City Cycles participate in all decisions relating to the business, accounts, selling, repairs, wheel building, etc. This is done in regular collective meetings where all decisions are discussed before being acted on. Inexperienced and newer members are especially given space and encouragement to say their piece.

Jobs are rotated on a regular basis to alleviate monotony and maintain interest. Summertime is when Inner City Cycles does most of its business. It is run at a profit and most of the surplus is re-invested into stock to cater for the 'instant' demand of customers who tend to want equipment on the spot (a reflection of Western society supplying instant gratification for its consumers). Winter sales slacken off and by mutual agreement members of the collective take 'time off' in the form of holidays to counter this period of decreased activity.

The decision making process evolved to its present format (its still growing) from 5 years ago when the shop first started with one man and two women and the man making all the biggest and most important decisions to the annoyance of the women. This resolved itself when the man left to take up the editorship of a cycling magazine, although the people concerned feel it would have been tackled anyway by the women becoming more vocal and taking equal control of the decision making processes.

The members have also decided not to have personal friends in the collective as they found that decisions can be unduly swayed by the bias of friends having too much influence on certain discussions and processes thus setting up undesirable power blocks.

Their ability to learn this kind of lesson and develop in this kind of way is the sort of thing which makes us point to Inner City Cycles as a good example of the autonomous collectives we are advocating.

Conclusion

We at the Black Rose Bookshop collective feel that there is a need for coherent direction of the anarchist movement. We believe that in order to realise a society of autonomous individuals and collectives anarchists must first focus their energies on building these collectives. From our experience we have seen that collectives are much more effective and successful if their goal is specific, and that they stay focussed on that specific task. The process of building collectives is enhanced when the internal structure of the group is seen as an integral part of the specific task. Getting rid of hierarchy, competition, and domination between individuals within groups requires group structures which enhance the freedom and autonomy of the individual. The structures which we advocate are actually successful only if the individuals recognise their free, autonomous capacities. To the extent that individuals recognise this there is a direct positive effect on the success of the collective's task.

In preparing this presentation, which we hope to produce into a pamphlet, we found that the groups which have visible non-hierarchical internal structures were the easiest to discuss and write about. In looking at the groups without the internal focus and structure, it was difficult to develop a coherent understanding of how they operate and thus discuss. This is important, for in order to create a great diversity of examples of anarchist practice and collectives in action, and to have these examples appeal to an increasingly larger portion of Australians, they must be easily understood.

The examples chosen for this discussion are not intended as attacks on or personal condemnations of any groups or individuals, and we sincerely hope they are not taken that way. We recognise the commitment of the groups which we have discussed and are very glad that they exist, strengthening the anarchist movement. We see this presentation as putting our perspective of a growing anarchist movement into the context of that which exists in Australia. We realise that we ourselves have a ways to go in overcoming what we see as barriers to becoming a strong anarchist collective. It is this type of internal critique which can only help to strengthen the individuals, groups and movement as a whole in moving towards an anarchist future.

APPENDIX - Black Rose Collective Documents as at May 1986

Preamble: The Basic Principles that Bring us Together

Anarchism, as derived from the classical Greek, strictly means without government, rulers, or imposed authority.

We extend this to all oppressors (For Example: church, state, boss, and so forth) and all forms of domination (For example: political, economic, religious, sexual, ageist, racial, educational, cultural, etc.).

To overcome these problems requires a revolutionary transformation of the society that we know.

As we understand it, an anarchist society is one in which each person takes responsibility for their own actions and how their actions affect the community. This requires that we learn alternatives to our customary reliance on government, bosses, churches, union officials, teachers, etc, and learn to think and act for ourselves, both as individuals and as members of a community. Voluntary cooperation and solidarity would replace competition as the functional basis of society. Skills and resources would be shared on the basis of needs not privileges.

We hope to build a free society based upon voluntary cooperation, solidarity and mutual aid. Such a society would be organised in a decentralised and non-hierarchical way; the social and physical structures in this society should be in harmony with the surrounding ecology and environment.

The means chosen to bring about this social transformation must be consistent with the ends sought. Accordingly, we have a specific commitment to developing and implementing techniques needed to achieve our aims, and constantly subjecting our techniques and aims to rigorous review.

Aims and Objectives

1. *To disseminate anarchist and related literature as widely and as cheaply as possible.*
 - Through maintaining, and encouraging the growth of, a stable shopfront location.
 - By setting up bookstalls at appropriate places, e.g. on campus, at the domain, rallies or conferences.
 - By involvement in relevant community activities as an anarchist bookshop, e.g. fairs, festivals, fetes and frolics.
 - By supplying books, information and encouragement to other groups or individuals wanting to set up anarchist bookstalls.
 - By supplying information, encouragement and other appropriate support to anarchist or related projects.

- By providing an outlet for the literature of sympathetic groups.
 - To act as a local distributor of records of selected publishers.
2. *To develop a model of collective anarchist organisation.*
- By developing and practising techniques and methods of personal growth and general cooperative and revolutionary practices, and passing on these skills to other groups and collectives where appropriate.
 - By consciously functioning in a non-discriminatory, non-hierarchical and caring way.
 - By encouraging interested people to become involved.
 - By participating in, and encouraging the growth of, appropriate regional and international networks.
 - By striving toward ecologically sound practices on our premises.
 - By expressing solidarity with appropriate campaigns.
3. *To run an anti profit bookshop as a public example of anarchy in action.*
- By relying solely on voluntary labour.
 - By relying solely on donations to cover rent and maintenance of the premises.
 - By spending all takings from sales on the replacement of stock.
 - By operating with a minimal markup which generally allows us to sell well below the recommended retail price.

Membership of the Collective

Membership is open to anybody, who wants to help make anarchist literature available, providing certain basic requirements are met.

Basic Requirements

- Agreement with the aims and objectives of the collective.
- Acceptance by all the existing members of the collective.
- A commitment to working within collectively decided procedures.
- Participation in the job rotation scheme.
- A willingness to do regular shifts in the shop, suggested minimum of one per fortnight.
- Attendance at regular meetings of the collective, suggested minimum of one per fortnight.

Note 1: It is expected that members of the collective will attend all meetings and will do at least one regular weekly shift. The suggested minimums listed are the lowest level necessary for the survival of the "collective spirit" of the bookshop. They should not be read as the desired level of involvement.

Note 2: We expect all members to have enough social awareness to clean up after themselves and to do their fair share of general cleaning and maintenance work around the shop.

Consensus Decision Making

We see consensus as a practical approach to making decisions within our collective. When consensus is reached it means we have a result which all members agree is the best possible in view of the issues and circumstances involved.

For consensus to be reached it is necessary that all participants share some agreement as to underlying fundamental issues, and that they are able to communicate their ideas effectively to each other. In seeking consensus, each person needs to contribute their thoughts in a non-dogmatic and flexible manner so that these thoughts can be woven together to formulate an overall position which respects the essential elements of each person's thinking.

By contrast, if people take the approach that "this is what I think and I'm sticking to it because it's MY idea", then agreement can only be reached through a process of compromise. Compromise differs from consensus because it involves sacrificing something you want in order to get an answer; it assumes that there is only one way to achieve what you really want and that you already know what it is. Any change thus feels like a loss. However, with consensus the group seeks to resolve disagreements by finding new solutions which participants understand as a new and better way of seeing the question at hand. For those taking part it means the answer changes because the question at hand becomes clearer. The process is thus felt as one of growth rather than one of whittling away.

When first approaching consensus a compromising attitude is helpful in unlearning the 'territorial' approach to ideas encouraged by society at large. Even after acquiring the skills needed to use consensus it may not always be possible to avoid dissent at all times. Therefore, we say that in some difficult situations it is possible for a person to agree to the group making a decision, but record their dissent from it. While this is a departure from consensus, it is not going as far as voting. Provided that this remains a last resort and is used infrequently, employing this method will not endanger the ongoing consensus of the group.



Black Rose Social Centre is currently located at 22 Enmore rd in Newtown

We host regular events such as film screenings & radical discussions.

We have a lending library, a free shop and espresso machine.

We try to be open from 10am to 10pm 7 days a week.

We can be contacted at: black.rose@riseup.net

blackrosenewtown.wordpress.com